



McE  
4/9

MINISTER FOR TRADE  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

17 SEP 1959

My dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for forwarding me a copy of Mr. Eric White's personal letter to you of July 27th. In view of the statements made in this letter I have discussed the contents with my Department.

Mr. White has decided to open an office in London and has sought an opportunity of obtaining some of the Commonwealth's work in London. Many of the comments he has made in his letter are misleading and merit rather detailed comment.

He has painted in his personal letter to you a story of mixed loyalties and sloppy administration in my own Department's publicity activities in London. The comments range from alleged assertions by Trade officers in London that the High Commissioner has been showing a disposition to meddle in publicity affairs; that trade publicity officers "were not subject to orders from the High Commissioner" and that trade officers "seemed to be perplexed about responsibilities and authority".

You will be aware that the United Kingdom publicity Vote is administered by a Committee comprising the Chairmen of the Marketing Boards and the Secretary of the Department of Primary Industry under the Chairmanship of Mr. E.P. McClintock, First Assistant Secretary of my Department. Its counterpart in London, the London Publicity Committee since the beginning of the campaign has been - and still is - chaired by the Deputy High Commissioner.

The Overseas Trade Publicity Committee recently met in London and went over with a fine tooth comb the planning and the execution of the campaign in a series of meetings lasting for 10 days. During these meetings the Committee confirmed for a further twelve months the use of the commercial agencies now retained by the London Publicity Committee.

Against this background I was disappointed to read Mr. White's letter, as it appears that he is quite deliberately slanting his views to gain a personal advantage for his own firm. As a matter of interest, my Department uses the services of Eric White and Associates to obtain articles for use in the United Kingdom. It has been using these services for almost twelve months and my officers advise me that the firm's record of efficiency - and costs in relation to work done - has been anything but satisfactory. Much of their material has been rewritten in London.

The Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies, C.H., Q.C., M.P.,  
Prime Minister,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

Mr. White's representatives - and later Mr. White - discussed with Mr. McClintock of my Department the prospects of his taking over part of the Commonwealth's activities in London and was told that Mr. McClintock would not recommend it to me. The reason was that the Department needed in London specialists in the London publicity methods.

Mr. McClintock suggested to Mr. White at the time that he had noticed a number of British firms who were worrying about the German/U.S./Japanese competition in the Australian market and were thinking of publicising products more widely in this market. He suggested that just as White was at a disadvantage in London, he would surely be at an advantage in securing British accounts in Australia. He suggested that soliciting such business might be the best use of White's London office.

In these circumstances I feel White's letter lacks generosity and in fact lacks honesty.

Mr. White also spoke of investment publicity and I understand the Inter-Departmental Committee has now prepared a recommendation to Cabinet and Mr. White was told that, pending a decision on this subject it was not possible to discuss how the programme would be implemented.

Mr. McClintock reviewed for Mr. White the experience of the Overseas Trade Publicity Committee over the past four years and indicated the importance of retaining agencies which were skilled in U.K. marketing and merchandising. He reviewed the improved effectiveness of the agencies which resulted in their lengthy experience of Australian problems. He concluded by saying that until better facilities were offered there was no benefit to be obtained in dropping a successful agency. Mr. McClintock told Mr. White he would be prepared to place any request received from White before me and before the Overseas Trade Publicity Committee, but also advised him that he would not recommend using White's services until he (White) could demonstrate that he could provide more effective services than those available from the agencies now used by the Overseas Trade Publicity Committee.

Mr. White goes on to touch on the whole vexed problem of Government publicity and suggests that the money now being spent on publicity abroad could obtain far greater publicity impact for Australia if the money were spent with private enterprise publicists who would work under Government direction.

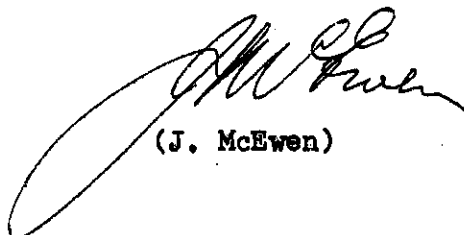
My own Department is probably the largest user of private publicity resources. It uses commercial designers, advertising and public relations facilities in Australia and in many overseas countries. Its account with the P.L.A.N. Agency in London is the third or fourth biggest account held by that agency. In U.S.A. it has used recently private public relations agencies in pearl shell promotion, and it retains agencies in France, Germany and Switzerland for specific publicity projects.

Despite its adherence to the principle of using commercial publicity people under tight direction, my Department is the first to emphasise the problems of control and of interpretation involved in such a method of operating.

The principle is considered sound but all too frequently in the view of my Department commercial publicity people oversimplify the case for the use of commercial agencies by Governments. My own Department is moving towards a position where it sets its policy, prepares the material and retains agencies to place such material in magazines etc. etc. This is as far as it feels it can go in the use of commercial agencies at present.

As a matter of interest, I understand my Department is already working with the Australian News and Information Bureau, the Australian National Travel Association and the Departments of Immigration and External Affairs, to work out a series of agreed objectives for overseas publicity and to establish satisfactory methods of co-operation between Departments so as to give maximum effectiveness for publicity money spent overseas. I understand that Mr. Bunting is being kept advised of developments. This work would seem to me to be an excellent basis on which to begin some discussions as to the Government's attitude to the proposals on publicity organisation placed before the Government in the Kennedy report.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. McEwen', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the bottom left of the signature.

(J. McEwen)